

benefit. Seniors will be able to choose their specialists, their hospitals, and their primary doctors. The fee-for-service arrangement would offer seniors similar kinds of choices now enjoyed by the Members of Congress, who are given a broad choice among competing health care plans. What is good for the public servants, including Members of the House and Senate, is good for America's seniors.

Third, seniors who want the kind of benefits available in managed care plans, including prescription drug coverage, will have that choice as well. This option would place seniors in an affordable network of doctors, provide drug coverage, and allow seniors to keep their out-of-pocket costs to a minimum.

Moving toward this system will take time, and as we make these changes, all American seniors will receive a prescription drug discount card to use right away. And low-income seniors will be eligible immediately for the annual \$600 Medicare prescription benefit.

Leaders of both political parties have talked for years about this issue, about adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. And the time for action is now. The budget I submitted will commit an additional \$400 billion over that which we have already committed to, over the next decade to implement this vision of a stronger Medicare system. We are committed to reform; we are committed to funding the reforms.

We have a responsibility—the docs, those of us in elected office, America's seniors—to work together to make sure Medicare fulfills its promise for this generation and for generations to come.

Our Medicare system depends on the skill and dedication of physicians. You know that. And that dedication should be fairly compensated. As Yank mentioned, we work with Congress to protect doctors from deep cuts in Medicare disbursements. Effective this past Saturday, instead of a 4.4-percent reduction in Medicare payments, docs will receive a 1.6-percent increase. This increase is a sign of confidence in our doctors, and I hope that all of you will show your confidence in Medi-

care by staying in the system. Medicare needs you. Our seniors need you.

Whether the issue is reforming Medicare, enhancing patient safety, or correcting abuses in the legal system, the stakes are high. We must make sure that the choices of patients and the judgment of doctors are at the center of American health care. We must preserve the great innovation and quality of private medicine. We must keep our commitments to the elderly, and help bring the healing miracle of modern medicine to the people who need it in our time.

All of you as members of the medical profession exercise that healing power and uphold a great trust. I appreciate the work you do. You have my respect. And in the days ahead, I look forward to working with you on these needed reforms. May God bless your work. And may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Dr. Yank Coble, Jr., president, Dr. Michael D. Maves, executive vice president, and Dr. J. Edward Hill, chair of the board of trustees, American Medical Association. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Release of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Funding

March 4, 2003

I am pleased to announce today that the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson is releasing \$150 million in Low Income Home Energy Assistance funding. This additional funding will provide much needed help for families struggling with rising heating costs. This new money, combined with emergency funds released in January, will help keep many Americans warm during this cold winter.

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Request for Funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service

March 4, 2003

Mr. Speaker:

I ask the Congress to consider the enclosed request for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The request is needed to liquidate legitimate prior-year obligations for eligible participants in the AmeriCorps program, to complete the implementation of a comprehensive corrective action plan developed by CNCS to strengthen financial management, and to provide flexibility to support more than 50,000 AmeriCorps members in FY 2003. This request will not increase my FY 2004 request.

The details of this request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. I concur with his comments and observations.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Telecommunications Payments to Cuba

March 5, 2003

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 1705(e)(6) of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, as amended by section 102(g) of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996, 22 U.S.C. 6004(e)(6), I transmit herewith a semiannual report prepared by my Administration detailing payments made to Cuba by United States persons as a result of the provision of telecommunications services pursuant to Department of the Treasury specific licenses.

George W. Bush

The White House,
March 5, 2003.

Statement on the Senate Filibuster To Block a Vote on the Nomination of Miguel Estrada

March 6, 2003

Miguel Estrada is a well-qualified nominee to the U.S. Court of Appeals who has been waiting nearly 2 years for an up or down vote in the United States Senate. The decision today by 44 Senators to continue to filibuster and block a vote on this nomination is a disgrace.

The Senate has a responsibility to exercise its constitutional advice and consent function and hold an up or down vote on a judicial nominee within a reasonable time. Some Senators who once insisted that every appeals court nominee deserves a timely vote have now abandoned that principle for partisan politics. Their tactics are an injustice and unfair to the good man I have nominated and unfaithful to the Senate's own obligations.

These Senators are holding Miguel Estrada to a double standard. I will stand by Miguel Estrada's side until he is sworn in as a judge. I call on the Senate Democratic leadership to stop playing politics and permit a vote on Miguel Estrada's nomination. Let each Senator vote as he or she thinks best, but give the man a vote.

The President's News Conference

March 6, 2003

The President. Good evening. I'm pleased to take your questions tonight and to discuss with the American people the serious matters facing our country and the world.

This has been an important week on two fronts on our war against terror. First, thanks to the hard work of American and Pakistani officials, we captured the mastermind of the September the 11th attacks against our Nation. Khalid Sheik Mohammed conceived and planned the hijackings and directed the actions of the hijackers. We believe his capture will further disrupt the terror network and their planning for additional attacks.

Second, we have arrived at an important moment in confronting the threat posed to our Nation and to peace by Saddam Hussein